GOVERNMENT OF
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Speech from the Throne

Delivered at the Opening of
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General Assembly of the
Province of Newfoundland and Labrador
on Tuesday, March 15, 2005

by His Honour
The Honourable Edward Roberts, ONL, QC
Lieutenant Governor of
Newfoundland and Labrador

A New Future, A Renewed Pride

Mr. Speaker, Members of the House of Assembly and people of Newfoundland and Labrador:

This year, My Government will undertake a range of new and improved initiatives to more effectively seize the opportunities to grow our economy, invest in our culture, and demonstrate a strong social concience.

But first, it is worthwhile to reflect upon one of the most important developments in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador. On the fifth of June in 2004, the Prime Minister accepted My First Minister's proposal for the fair sharing of offshore oil and gas revenue. On the fourteenth of February in 2005, following eight months of challenging discussions of details, My Government and the Government of Canada ratified a groundbreaking new agreement on offshore revenues that enables Newfoundland and Labrador to retain 100% of its provincial offshore revenue, truly making this province the principal beneficiary of our offshore resources. This was indeed a turning point in our province's history, a moment that will define our province for generations to come.

The agreement includes the advance provision by the Government of Canada of two billion dollars in lieu of revenue that will flow in years to come; however, the total revenue over the life of the agreement will likely be even greater than this. Still, the magnitude of the fiscal challenge our province faces is such that, even with this substantial new revenue, one cannot afford to waste one precious penny. My Government is determined to invest the new revenue wisely in ways that will generate the greatest long-term return for our province and enable future generations to share in the benefits of these nonrenewable resources long after they are depleted.

My Government thanks Prime Minister Martin for recognizing our province's unique financial challenges and resolving to help us address them. Our province also recognizes the tremendous efforts of My Premier. He was tenacious and determined in his fight for greater benefits for this province. His spirit, attitude and leadership have resulted in a brighter future for Newfoundland and Labrador.

> *Newfoundland and Labrador aspires to become one of Canada's brightest success stories and to make even stronger contributions to the Canadian family as a truly equal partner, in practice as well as principle.*

Money aside, the true significance of the Atlantic Accord 2005 is pride. During the difficult period of talks on the Atlantic Accord, our province's residents, expatriates, and supporters alike stood steadfastly together, unshakable in their confidence and unwavering in their commitment to Newfoundland and Labrador. Through media such as the worldwide web, movers and shakers like Kevin McCann of the "FairDealforNewfoundland.com" web site demonstrated with competence the new attitude that has taken hold in Newfoundland and Labrador. My Government is deeply appreciative of the outpouring of support during this process and commends the people of Newfoundland and Labrador for standing together for the greater good of us all. Even more important than the revenue, this new attitude of pride and self-confidence is the currency that will purchase our province's success in the years ahead.

This new attitude is strongly reflected in our province's culture. Our stories, songs, traditions, and pictures have always reflected resilience and tenacity in the face of great obstacles; but more and more, our cultural icons are encouraging our people to aim higher. It is time to put the bountiful resources of our province to work for

our people so our sons and daughters can remain here to raise sons and daughters of their own. These sentiments are echoed in the powerful lyrics of bands like Great Big Sea, who sing:

> *In this beautiful life,*
> *there's always some sorrow*
> *It's a double-edged knife,*
> *but there's always tomorrow*
> *It's up to you now if you sink or swim*
> *Keep the faith and your ship will come in.*
>
> *[© Excerpt from "Ordinary Day" by Alan Doyle and Séan McCann. Used with permission.]*

This strength also sings through the songs of Ron Hynes, RASA, Shaye, Crush, Kevin Collins, Pamela Morgan, Jason Greeley, The Flummies, Spirit of Newfoundland, The Fables, Brothers in Stereo, The Irish Descendants, Jenny Gear, The Carol Players, The Masterless Men, and so many other promising musicians. It reverberates through the writings of Ed Riche, Wayne Johnston, Lisa Moore, Michael Winter, Ramona Dearing, Leo Furey, Nellie Strowbridge, Beth Ryan, Joel Hynes, and Michael Crummey, to name but a few. It is portrayed in the theatrical work of Jillian Keiley, Lois Brown, and Donna Butt. It is reflected in the photography of Sheilagh O'Leary, Brian Ricks, and Manfred Buchheit and the paintings of Mary Pratt, Lloyd Pretty, Shelley Cornick, Ian Sparkes, E.J. Wareham, and a host of others. It is framed in the films of Paul Pope and Gerry Rogers. It shines through the work of Seamus O'Regan, Rick Mercer, Rex Murphy, Mary Walsh, Gordon Pinsent, Robert Joy, Tina Maddigan, and Sebastian Spence. And this is only the tip of the iceberg of the talent that Newfoundland and Labrador is producing.

Through so many media in so many ways, our people and indeed the entire world are beginning to see

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Newfoundland and Labrador as they have never seen it before. Where once there was uncertainty, there is now renewed pride. Where once there was pessimism, there is now renewed hope. Where once there was powerlessness, there is now renewed confidence in our ability to shape our destiny to our own design. If our grandparents could succeed in carving a home here when the opportunities were so limited, how much greater our successes can be with opportunities that are so vast.

Celebrating Our Culture

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

> *With a new Atlantic Accord now successfully achieved, My Government is prepared to move forward, in a much more visible and powerful way, with far-reaching economic development initiatives and cultural policy strategies.*

Now that our people have been reinvigorated by a renewed pride and hope for our future, we as a society must not allow that sense of self-confidence and optimism to fade. Rather, we must nurture and sustain our hope and pride so that it propels our people to a brighter future. We can best build that brighter future if tomorrow's leaders have a better appreciation of the legacy they have inherited from our generations.

Music, drama, writing, film, and visual arts, along with other forms of expression, allow us to capture and communicate our culture. In its Blueprint for the Future, My Government stated that, "in its first mandate, government will increase the presence of cultural content in the school curriculum and foster links between artists and students in the school environment." Through the

implementation of a sustained, integrated, and coherent strategy. Newfoundland and Labrador history and culture will be affirmed as a key feature of the K-12 curriculum, and students will develop a critical awareness of the role of the arts in creating and reflecting our heritage. Students, and those who witness their expression of the arts, will also come to respect the contributions of individuals and cultural groups to the arts in both local and provincial contexts and will recognize the value of the arts as a record of our unique experience.

The social, cultural, and economic benefits of My Government's cultural strategy will be significant. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, especially our younger people, will grow in their understanding and appreciation of our unique culture. Their sense of place will help build the confidence to carry the province proudly through the next generations.

To promote the arts generally, My Government will introduce a comprehensive fine arts and culture strategy within the education system that includes expanding the curriculum for the arts, music, theatre arts, fine arts, and social studies; supporting professional development; promoting our culture through the acquisition of works by local authors, artists, and performers; and investing in the acquisition and repair of musical equipment.

To promote collaboration with our artists, My Government will work with the province's writers and artists to develop a new Artists in Schools Program to connect musical, dramatic, and visual artists with students in classrooms, enabling them to benefit directly from the inspiration and mentorship that our cultural muses can provide. There will also be arts institutes where students can benefit from hands-on mentoring, and fine arts conferences to facilitate teachers' professional growth.

The intent of My Government's actions is to promote our culture and instill in our young people a stronger sense of pride in who we are as a people.

This renewed focus on identity and culture is nowhere more important than in our province's Aboriginal communities. My Government is committed to the development of culturally-relevant curriculum, beginning with social studies and art, to reflect the rich legacies of Aboriginal peoples. We will accomplish this through provincial investment and through partnership, where possible, with federal authorities at Canadian Heritage and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

The needs and aspirations of the Innu of Labrador are a priority of My Government. In collaboration with the Government of Canada and Innu Band Councils, My Government is committed to a process that will ensure the education system fulfils the needs of young people in the Innu communities. Ultimately, the goal is to provide the Innu communities with the means to take control of their own lives and their own collective destiny. Education is fundamental to the success of that endeavour. All our province's young people deserve an opportunity to acquire the skills and knowledge they need to reach their potential, and My Government is committed to enabling this.

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly: Our culture not only inspires; it also employs. No area of opportunity for business growth is more promising or exciting than our province's cultural sector. By blending the past and the present and combining outside and local influences, contemporary creators have developed a distinctive "voice" that is gaining recognition internationally. We are like no other place, and My Government intends to nurture that uniqueness.

In our province, culture is a driver of economic wealth and contributes to better education, identity and social cohesion, community health, and quality of life. It also shapes the face of Newfoundland and Labrador that greets the wider world.

> *To nurture our cultural strengths, My Government will bring forward a Strategic Cultural Plan this year to promote our heritage, celebrate our identity, and champion creativity.*

To ensure our plan is comprehensive and effective, My Government will convene a roundtable discussion with the arts and heritage communities on the proposed details and, together, we will embark on a partnership of strengthening our cultural identity, building a creative province, and seizing the economic opportunities for generations to come.

My Government looks forward to the opening of one of the most unique and exciting cultural facilities in Canada. The Rooms will house the Archives, Art Gallery, and Museum of Newfoundland and Labrador. The Rooms will offer a combination of excellent programs and services, together with effective educational and public outreach programs, to make the institution relevant and meaningful for every school-aged child and adult in our province.

My Government will also create a Provincial Historic Sites and Monuments Board to identify, designate, preserve, and celebrate the people, places and events that embody the rich history of Newfoundland and Labrador.

My Government is also delighted this year to join with the Roman Catholic community of Newfoundland and Labrador in celebrating the 150th anniversary of the completion and consecration of the Basilica-Cathedral of

St. John the Baptist in St. John's. Our Province celebrates with its Roman Catholic community the remarkable contributions that the Church has made throughout Newfoundland and Labrador over the centuries.

Newfoundland and Labrador is being discovered again, this time as a unique, exotic, tourism destination. The province's unique natural attractions, its communities and its people, and its cultural heritage are powerful assets for our tourism industry. From Mackinsons to Makkovik and from Roddickton to Ramea, our visitors are captivated by the magnificent landscape and seascape, our unique history and culture, and a pride that is unmatched anywhere.

Tourism is a real export earner and wealth generator for a destination, particularly one having the potential this province has. My Government recognizes that an investment in tourism will generate revenue in all regions of the province through increased visitors and increased capacity of accommodations and activities, resulting in increased employment and revenue for tourism operators and the communities in which they reside.

My Government believes that, in order to reach our true tourism potential, we must continue to professionally market our destination. It is through effective and increased marketing efforts that we will continue to grow our share of non-resident visitors and spending.

Fostering Economic Growth

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly: Cultural tourism is just one opportunity to foster economic growth. There are many others. In all sectors of our economy, My Government will begin replacing barriers to opportunity with bridges to success.

My Government has already outlined a comprehensive blueprint for economic development. Newfoundland and Labrador competes for investment and export market share against many other jurisdictions. Our economic future will be determined by our success in reaching, and ultimately exceeding, not just our nearest competitors in the rest of Canada and other North Atlantic countries, but also the emerging economic powers of the Pacific rim.

> *The focus must be on building a competitive economy driven by private sector firms selling in competitive markets and operating out of all regions of our province. The key to success will be our province's performance in attracting investment, driving innovation, and building and attracting new skills throughout the province.*

Last year, My Government established a new Department of Business to facilitate growth and investment throughout rural and urban regions of our province. My Government will strive to make Newfoundland and Labrador a more business friendly location and work to ensure continued growth and investment in our province.

In its inaugural year, the Department of Business has undertaken a comprehensive inventory of provincial business development programs. This inventory will allow My Government to assess its business support functions

and help it to identify where enhanced measures will need to be targeted.

Small and medium size businesses are the backbone of our province's economy. To grow economic opportunities, our province must nurture its business sector.

The issue of poor access to capital is well documented as a major barrier to business growth in Newfoundland and Labrador. My Government is preparing to address this weakness with significant new initiatives to leverage business success. In particular, My Government will create sources of capital to enable businesses to establish, grow, diversify, and prosper.

The Department of Business has also undertaken a strategic audit of Government's branding practices. In order to identify ways to better position Newfoundland and Labrador as an attractive place in which to visit, live and set up business, My Government will be developing a major branding initiative.

My Government will create strong trade and marketing development units to help businesses identify new opportunities for growth. It will also seek the reduction of trade barriers.

To advance diversification, My Government has undertaken a range of initiatives involving broadband, marine industries, provincial education export strategies, and the provincial nominee program. This year, My Government will unveil a major Innovation Strategy that will develop an advanced technology base in the province, with a major emphasis on ocean technology and marine sciences in the Avalon area and the emerging environmental sector in western Newfoundland.

In the months ahead, My Government will move forward with a Rural Development Strategy for Newfoundland and Labrador. My departments of Business and Innovation, Trade and Rural Development, in partnership with other levels of government, regional economic development boards, small business, industry and community organizations, will continue to implement a number of key initiatives that are significantly benefitting our rural economies.

Last year, My Government established a Rural Secretariat to coordinate initiatives to revitalize our rural communities. Following consultations, My Government has recently announced a structure for the Rural Secretariat which will enhance partnerships and decision-making between government and communities. The structure will involve nine sustainable regions each with a Regional Council, and a Provincial Council of the Rural Secretariat. The Provincial Council will meet directly with Cabinet and ensure regional perspectives inform public policy development and implementation.

My Government has also recently hired a Chief Information Officer who will be responsible for streamlining and enhancing service delivery, reforming management and operational IT practices throughout government, and bridging the role of government in public service delivery with the private sector. The new Chief Information Officer has completed a review of the government's information technology functions and found considerable opportunity for new approaches. Strategic improvements will be made to My Government's IT functions that will result in a more efficient, better organized, and accessible provincial government.

Productivity, competitiveness and a stable labour climate are hallmarks to economic growth. Last year My

Government established the Labour Relations Agency to work toward the improvement of labour relations in the province and to maintain a stable labour relations climate conducive to economic growth. This year, we will enhance the role of the Agency in improving productivity and competitiveness in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Agency will expand its work with business and labour at the level of the workplace, and build strategic partnerships with other government departments in the pursuit of economic development.

Harnessing Our Natural Resources

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly: My Government will take the lead in harnessing our bountiful natural resources for economic growth throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

> *The people of our province are determined to set the bar higher when determining acceptable arrangements for the development of our resources. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians must be the principal beneficiaries of these developments. No longer will our people watch quietly as our resources create opportunities for others at our expense.*

My Government is delighted with the achievements of the Hibernia, Terra Nova, and White Rose projects and is eager to advance development at Hebron-Ben Nevis and exploration in the Orphan and Laurentian basins and offshore Labrador. My Government will continue to work with developers to advance these and other projects. My Government will stand by its belief that there must be no more giveaways. It will explore opportunities to better harness these resources for the greater benefit of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

My Government is also pleased with successes and emerging opportunities in the mining and mineral exploration sector and will foster continued exploration and development in Labrador and on the Island.

My Government is in the process of developing a comprehensive Energy Plan to define energy needs, opportunities, and costs. In January of this year, My Government, in partnership with Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro, initiated a new approach to development of the Lower Churchill hydroelectric resource. We launched a Request for Expressions of Interest and Proposals for participation in the development. The deadline for submissions is March 31st. We will assess all our options and proceed when we have identified the best development concept. Our objective is to reach a development arrangement that ensures this province will realize significant, long-term economic benefits from this untapped, clean, renewable energy resource.

In the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture, My Government will create a Seafood Diversification and Development Division to address harvesting, processing, and marketing challenges in an integrated and comprehensive manner.

It will also create a new Sustainable Fisheries and Oceans Policy Division and expand its Planning Division to provide a better focus on fish and seafood trade issues. These and other changes will allow the department to implement new initiatives related to foreign overfishing, aquaculture, fish health, price-setting mechanisms, ecosystems management, trade and tariff barriers, and sustainable fisheries policy.

Earlier this month, My Government announced its intention to proceed with a raw material shares system for the crab fishery on a two-year pilot basis. Under the

pilot project, the amount of raw material that seafood producers can process will be capped as a condition of their crab processing licence. The system will improve regional distribution of crab processing and provide for a more orderly fishery for harvesters, processors, and fish plant workers. Our crab fishery is threatened by declining prices, unfavourable exchange rates, excess inventory, fish plant overcapacity, and the possibility of the federal government cutting quotas. It would be irresponsible to sit idly without acting to strengthen the economic engine of our fishery. My Government has committed to restructure our fish processing policies to promote sustainable balance and meaningful work in our rural areas.

My Government's Department of Environment and Conservation will spearhead a process to involve all sectors in identifying common values and implementing a shared vision for sustainable development. The department will also provide knowledge and support for environmental conservation so that our people can benefit from our resources for generations to come.

Last year, My Government indicated its support for a proposal to create a Centre of Environmental Excellence in western Newfoundland, using as its foundation the education, training, and research capacity of Memorial University's Sir Wilfred Grenfell College and the College of the North Atlantic. The vision for this centre of excellence is that it will serve as a catalyst for the establishment of innovative companies. Advanced research and educational programs would support and strengthen new business opportunities in such areas as forestry, environmental tourism, and geospatial mapping. In the upcoming year, My Government will finalize a concept in consultation with potential partners and stakeholders, and then undertake a detailed feasibility study along with a master plan.

Working With Our Communities

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

> *My Government believes it is vital to help our province's regions and communities discover new opportunities for development by pursuing new avenues of cooperation. My Government is committed to working with our communities to capitalize on opportunities that, collectively, will provide a foundation for future growth on a provincial scale.*
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> *A major obstacle to community development is deficient infrastructure. Infrastructure is exceptionally expensive to construct and repair, but wise investments reap sizeable dividends for local communities. My Government's infrastructure strategy is identifying needs, establishing priorities, and locating funds to proceed with important projects in multiple areas of our province. Providing this funding earlier is enabling municipalities to plan their activities better.*

One of My Government's greatest concerns is the level of debt that many municipalities are carrying and the inability of many of these smaller communities to service their debt with an aging and declining population. These demographic factors, compounded by economic challenges, have created unsustainable fiscal realities for many communities. My Government intends to work with the Federation of Municipalities to find creative, effective ways to alleviate debt loads.

Several municipalities are also experiencing significant challenges in obtaining and retaining appropriately-trained personnel to operate the increasingly-complicated infrastructure needed to meet drinking water and waste water standards. Having learned from the errors of others, My Government is determined to protect our

people from contaminated drinking water by working closely with our municipalities to ensure they have access to the necessary resources to carry out proper testing and proper reporting.

My Government will also invest in community recreation programs and infrastructure to advance community cohesiveness, support our athletes, enhance tourism opportunities, and improve the quality of life of our people.

Our people have demonstrated an exceptional commitment to community service and have built a formidable not-for-profit sector. Facing challenges from health services to community development, groups of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have come together to provide solutions to many of our challenges. We need these people and organizations more now than ever before. My Government is determined to strengthen the relationship between the government and the volunteer sector, to improve the grants process, and to identify opportunities for cooperation and collaboration.

My Government is proud of the many varied contributions our citizens make to their communities. Last year, My Government honoured the first recipients of the distinguished Order of Newfoundland and Labrador. This year, we will build on that tradition by honouring others whose contributions have made Newfoundland and Labrador stronger and more vibrant.

To keep our communities safe and secure, My Government will continue to invest in the strength of our police forces. We are deeply appreciative of the tremendous work our police officers do to protect us and preserve the peace. The recent tragedy in Alberta reminds us how much we should appreciate the commitment and sacrifices of our police officers. To the families of Constable Peter

Schiemann, Constable Anthony Gordon, Constable Leo Johnston, and Constable Brock Myrol, we offer our prayers and deepest sympathies.

Securing a Brighter Future for Labrador

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly: My Government recognizes that the people of Labrador face unique challenges. The barriers to development are pronounced in Labrador; yet, nowhere are the opportunities for growth greater.

Last year, My Government announced Phase III of the Trans-Labrador Highway; a new Upper Churchill recall agreement; the implementation of the Northern Agrifoods Development Strategy; a reconfigured Labrador Coastal Marine Service; air food lift support; and forestry agreements with the Innu Nation and the Labrador Métis Nation.

This year, in addition to the many Aboriginal issues addressed earlier, My Government will move forward with initiatives to secure a brighter future for all Labradorians.

> *My Government will commission the Department of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs to develop a Northern Strategic Plan to address the needs for social and economic development in Labrador. The department will work closely with the people of Labrador to ensure the plan reflects the priorities and aspirations of Labradorians.*

My Government will continue to promote Labrador's tremendous tourism potential through Destination Labrador.

On the 22nd of January, history was made in the northern Labrador community of Nain. With an overwhelming mandate from the Inuit people of our province, the Labrador Inuit Association entered into a groundbreaking land claims agreement with the Government of Canada and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, establishing the Government of Nunatsiavut - "Our Beautiful Land". For thirty years, community leaders laboured to reach this agreement. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians congratulate the Inuit people of Labrador for giving all of us a timely lesson on the importance of patient perseverance. In the words of the Inuttitut language, *"Sivunitsavut pitsiatunejuk!"* - "Our future is in great hands!"

Having concluded the historic land claims agreement with the Labrador Inuit Association, My Government is committed to working with the province's other Aboriginal peoples to achieve agreements and strategies to advance the well-being of Aboriginal communities.

My Government, by requiring an adjacency principle, will ensure that Labradorians are given opportunities to find employment on major development projects in Labrador's communities.

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are especially proud of Canadian Forces Base 5-Wing Goose Bay. This world-class facility has trained flight crews from many countries over the years and contributed greatly to world peace and security. When its future became uncertain, My Government approached the Government of Canada and the governments of other countries in a collaborative effort to identify new uses that would secure a bright future for our base.

My Government was delighted in February with the appointment of General Rick Hillier as the Government

of Canada's Chief of the Defence Staff. One of our province's most-distinguished sons, General Hillier has already been successful in convincing the Government of Canada to significantly expand its defence spending. My Government will work closely with General Hillier and the federal government to secure new opportunities that will diversify 5-Wing Goose Bay and sustain its operations for years to come.

On the 8th of March in Labrador, My Government announced an investment this year of at least $56 million to improve access to health services, strengthen Aboriginal communities, build and repair infrastructure, and expand economic opportunities. This was the strongest signal yet that My Government intends to help Labrador thrive and prosper and see Labradorians enjoy the same standard of living enjoyed by residents living on the Island.

My Government will also establish a branch of the Premier's Office in Happy Valley-Goose Bay to ensure a direct conduit between Labrador and My First Minister on the priorities, views, and concerns of Labradorians.

Getting People Healthier

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly: While My Government is committed to move Newfoundland and Labrador ahead to better economic times, it recognizes there are significant social barriers to opportunity that we must confront together. My Government is committed to bringing down these barriers, beginning with the barriers to good health.

A healthier society is a stronger, more productive society. My Government will promote wellness to keep people healthier, and when people do become sick, My Government will provide funding to diagnose and treat them sooner and more effectively.

Last year, My Government announced a new MRI for Corner Brook; expanded dialysis services; an expanded provincial drug program; new immunizations for children; a new Division of Aging and Seniors; a new Chief Nurse position; a renewed commitment to smoke-free workplaces; an OxyContin task force; and a financial commitment to improve the safety of our personal care homes.

The First Ministers' Health Accord provides substantial additional funding to Newfoundland and Labrador to enable the province to reduce wait times and provide better care for patients. My Government will invest strategically to achieve needed advances in health care delivery. Areas of focus will include diagnostic services, vision restoration, joint replacement, cancer and cardiac care, and access to services for residents in northern areas.

To ensure our health and community services system meets the needs of the people it serves as effectively as it can, My Government will focus on planning for the delivery of services in each region of the province. These plans will focus on the appropriate locations of services, the appropriate skill mix of our service providers, the best means of integrating services, the delivery of new models of primary health care, and strengthening of public health.

My Government is especially committed to secure and advance the quality of care that our seniors receive. We must not and will not forget the men and women who

contributed so much to our province over the years and asked for so little in return. With the best interests of our seniors guiding its actions, My Government will move ahead this year to design and implement a long-term care strategy in order to both increase the number of long-term care beds around our province and to identify other necessary supports to allow our seniors to remain in their communities.

My Government believes we can reduce the demands on our health care system by promoting health and wellness. Recent national reports indicate Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are among Canada's most obese and inactive. The rate of childhood-onset diabetes is among the highest in the country. My Government will foster a culture of wellness in our classrooms and develop a planned and sequential health and physical education program in our schools to inspire in our young people a lifelong commitment to regular exercise, healthy eating, and positive self esteem. My Government is also developing new nutrition guidelines for schools that will ensure students are provided with healthy food choices and given information about healthy eating. If we can support our young people eating well and exercising regularly, we as a society will be healthier, hardier, and happier.

My Government appreciates the recommendations it received from the Reid/Power inquiry and OxyContin Task Force Report and will refine and implement a mental health and addictions plan to ensure people in need of mental health and addictions services are able to access them.

Addressing Poverty

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly: My Government recognizes the devastating effects of poverty and is committed to taking steps to alleviate and reduce poverty.

Last year, My Government announced tax cuts for the poor; a home heating fuel rebate; indexation of the Newfoundland and Labrador Child Benefit rate; indexation of the Seniors' Benefit rate; an enhanced Mother Baby Nutrition Supplement; an expanded Supported Employment Program for individuals with developmental disabilities; improved delivery of income support and employment and career services; a higher minimum wage; and funding for youth support programs, including the unique Youth Promise Challenge and a new shelter and resource centre for young people.

> *Building on several measures announced last year, My Government will refine and implement a comprehensive Poverty Reduction Strategy in collaboration with stakeholders both within and outside the government.*

The best remedy for poverty is often a secure job. My Government will foster stronger labour force attachment by taking an aggressive approach in assisting income support clients, particularly youth, to access employment.

The Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment will establish a pilot Supported Employment for Single Parents Program in a region outside the Avalon. It will implement a new earnings exemption model to better assist income support clients who are employed.

My Government will integrate women's voices and perspectives, including those of Aboriginal women, when

formulating public policies. It will also enhance the use of gender-based analysis across departments, agencies, boards, and commissions to evaluate and advance the status of women in our province.

My Government will continue its commitment to violence prevention through a new violence prevention program with new management and leadership; new funding to fight violence against Aboriginal women in Labrador; new funding for a much-needed women's shelter in Hopedale; and new family violence legislation that will be introduced.

There will be special measures to ensure women share equitably in the social and economic benefits of the province and to address employment barriers for women in non-traditional and resource-based industries. Women's participation in leadership and decision making will also be advanced through measures including supports for Aboriginal women.

Educating for Success

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

> *Recognizing that education is the key to both personal and economic development, My Government will help to bring down the barriers to learning so that our students and graduates are better able to seize the opportunities before them. Indeed, no issue is of greater importance, as Newfoundland and Labrador looks to the future, than the need to prepare our young people for success.*

Healthy, safe and comfortable buildings are essential for schools to succeed in their core mission of educating

children. To ensure our schools meet this standard, My Government will develop and implement a comprehensive capital financing and maintenance plan. This year, it will move forward with several major renovations of schools in various areas. My Government recently announced funding to correct problems caused by water infiltration into school buildings.

My Government believes a solid education must begin early in a child's life. To build on the work of the recently-established Ministerial Council for Early Childhood Learning, My Government will recognize early childhood learning as an important part of the education process. We will explore opportunities and options to ensure all children enter Kindergarten having had appropriate learning experiences in their pre-school years.

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly: Education does not end with grade school. More and more, our students must pursue post-secondary studies to gain the knowledge, skills, and credentials they need to take on challenging careers and reach their potential.

> *Given the unprecedented demand for greater diversification and improved sustainability, we recognize that the provincial public post-secondary system must undergo change and renewal. Further, the increasing pace of change requires us to constantly explore strategies to improve the way our public post-secondary education system operates.*

To accomplish this, My Government last year commissioned a White Paper on Post-secondary Education in order to tailor the system to better prepare students for opportunities here at home. This work is underway, and My Government is prepared to begin implementing, in the year ahead, a range of measures based on recommendations flowing through this process.

My Government is particularly cognizant of the need to modernize post-secondary facilities to ensure our programs can prepare students to tackle modern challenges effectively. My Government will ensure our facilities and programs are modern and relevant to current and emerging needs.

My Government will also forecast skills requirements and plan ways of meeting the labour force demands with local graduates.

My Government will also create a Labour Market Development unit to consolidate related activities and positions. The demands on the provincial labour market are changing rapidly, and it is vitally important that this province be well positioned to respond. A skilled, well-trained labour force is key to the ongoing economic growth and prosperity of Newfoundland and Labrador. There is no more important time for us to emphasize education than now. We must maintain a viable post-secondary system while ensuring our students have the ability to compete with the best. We must all be partners in renewing and expanding our higher education system for the next generation. The White Paper on Public Post-secondary Education will establish the foundation for our future success.

Progress and Promise

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly: Even with a solid economic development agenda and a strong social conscience, My Government cannot lose sight of the fiscal challenges that our province continues to face.

My Government commenced its term in November of 2003 with a mandate and a plan to apply a new

approach to governance in Newfoundland and Labrador. While considerable work awaits our collective efforts, Newfoundland and Labrador is closer to realizing its dreams today than when My Government first began.

No challenge in 2004 was greater than the province's financial instability. Newfoundland and Labrador was facing billion-dollar deficits that, within a decade, would almost have doubled the province's net debt without decisive action to address the challenge head on. Independent auditors and advisors expressed their concerns about the province's fiscal sustainability, concerns that My Government shares. Our children deserve a legacy of promise and opportunity, not a stack of bills for the money we are spending today. That is why My Government remains committed to the strategy it announced last year to eliminate the cash deficit over its first term while significantly reducing the accrual deficit. Achieving fiscal sustainability means making choices, and last year, the responsible choices were difficult to make. By carefully balancing expenditures, My Government secured and enhanced a host of social and economic development programs that are vital to families and communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. The result is that we have begun to get a better handle on our fiscal challenges.

My Government invested in health care, education, justice and safety, assistance for children and families, and support for Aboriginal communities. To promote new opportunities, My Government invested in infrastructure, municipalities, business growth, and resource development. To promote openness and good governance, My Government brought forward measures to enhance planning, effectiveness, and accountability.

This year and in the years that follow, My Government will continue to identify and implement responsible measures that improve the way the people's government functions.

Through the program renewal process initiated last year, we have identified areas of strength and places where service delivery can be improved. As the process evolved, so did our focus.

> *Program renewal cannot be an isolated initiative: it is also a frame of mind, an attitude. Our public service must always be striving to improve, enhance, and modernize programs and services.*

Through program renewal, we have identified and started many positive, forward-thinking initiatives, but others will take time and strategy to implement.

In the coming year, My Government has plans for another extensive legislative agenda. In the Spring sitting of the Legislature, amendments will be introduced to the *Smoke-free Environment Act* to provide for a 100% ban on the use of tobacco in all public places. Amendments to the *Wild Life Act* will be introduced to provide greater enforcement and increased penalties for violations of the Act, especially related to inland fish species. And further automobile insurance reforms are expected to be brought forward based on the review by the Public Utilities Board and the Department of Government Services.

Building Stronger Federal-Provincial Relations

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

> *My Government is also deeply committed to a continued partnership and positive relationship with the Government of Canada.*

There have been tensions in recent months, but both sides are motivated to build a smooth working relationship in order to advance the fortunes of Newfoundland and Labrador and of Canada generally.

That desire resulted in the Atlantic Accord 2005. My Government is committed to build on this success and other achievements, such as the welcome new attention to health funding, foreign overfishing, and 5-Wing Goose Bay. In September of 2004, My Government was proud to be a part of an important agreement among the federal, provincial, and territorial governments on the provision of substantial new funding for health care. It was proud to help strengthen Canada's Equalization Program. Additionally, at My Government's urging, Prime Minister Paul Martin has drawn international attention to the scourge of unsustainable foreign fishing on our continental shelf. There have also been discussions and initiatives with respect to infrastructure, economic development, education, research, the federal presence in this province, and many other issues.

Other significant issues await our concerted efforts in the months and years ahead. My Government this year will focus on fisheries management, post-secondary educational infrastructure, child care, pharmacare, home care, regional economic development, culture, transportation services and infrastructure, energy development, and a range of other priorities.

A Time for Heroes

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly: As our people and My Government work to shape a brighter future, we remind ourselves that we are limited only by the breadth and depth of our dreams. In recent months, our people have dared to dream dreams that push far beyond the limits of our circumstances. Our confidence in our future has never been stronger than it is today. Our pride in ourselves has never been more secure than it is today. Our hopes for tomorrow have never been greater, yet we remain wholly grounded in reality.

Why? Because we have rediscovered something essential about ourselves that we were in danger of forgetting. If tribulation had made defeatists of our ancestors, none of us would be here. Our very existence is a testament to the grit, determination, and humanitarianism of the heroes who built this place. These soils are rich with their blood, the seas salty with the sweat of their labour. We are humbled by the magnitude of our legacy. It is on the shoulders of giants that we stand. How could we ever fall when we stand with heroes so great!

Let us never forget that these heroes stood, not alone, but side by side. At Beaumont Hamel, they fought and died bravely, side by side. On the merciless seas, they gave their lives, side by side. On the flakes and in the fields, they worked themselves into early graves, side by side. We will not loosen this albatross from our necks and achieve the prosperity we so richly deserve unless we vow that we will do so together, side by side.

> *The time has come for new heroes to step forward: men, women, and young people who can build their community, grow our economy, foster cooperation, and inspire the confidence we need to pursue our dreams together.*

Mr. Speaker, Members: We will not forget the legacy that makes us strong; but with renewed pride, we will build a new future of opportunity and self-reliance that is truly deserving of its illustrious heritage. This year, we will seize the opportunities to grow our economy and invest in our culture. And we will do so together, side by side.

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly: Estimates of expenditure will be laid before you in due course and you will be asked to grant supply to Her Majesty.

I invoke God's blessing upon you as you commence this new Session.

May Divine Providence guide you in your deliberation.